

# **Whitchurch-On-Thames Annual Parish Assembly**

## **May 2016**

**Attendees:** Jim Donahue, Keith Brooks, Rachel Hatcher, James Polanski, Kevin Bulmer, Mike Marshall (Allotments), Sue Matthews, Wendy Ferguson, Peter Ferguson, Hillary Jenson, Charles Cotgreave, Sally Woolhouse, Sarah Hanfry, Tom Suiter.

### **Chairman Keith Brooks opened the session with a report about the past year.**

Hello everyone. Thanks for coming to the Annual assembly. I would just like to say a few words generally about the past year as we have many reports to get through.

As you all know a year ago we formed a new council with myself heading it up as Chairman and Jim Donohue as Vice Chairman since then we have been joined by several residents who have chosen to give up some of their spare time and become councillors – James Polansky who has been involved in keeping our highways in good order and designing a new village sign in conjunction with our primary school children.

Dave Bowen who has been involved in negotiations to keep our bus service running and The Greyhound open – two essential services.

Rachel Hatcher – who has been involved in the development of our Village Plan and forming a Community Speed watch program.

Jon Steward – who has worked hard on keeping both the Village Green and the High Street looking very presentable and is a credit to Whitchurch.

Caroline Hart – who has put together the plans for our new pavilion on the village green which hopefully one day we will see a reality.

Jim Donohue my right hand man, what can I say he not only runs the Village Green Committee but is also constantly monitoring the requirements of the residents of the village – an essential part of Parish Council business.

And of course last but not least our Parish Clerk Felipa House whose assistance has been immense. I must say a big thank you to all these people who have helped me get through the year and enabled us to carry out many successful projects we just wouldn't have got these off the ground without their support. The ones that come to mind are the acquisition of the village hall, the opposition to the demolition of Eastfield house, the prevention of the creation of a holiday home adjacent to Thames Bank House and the management of the recently acquired village green.

We have many people who work hard to keep this village as one of the most sought after places to live in South Oxfordshire. These include our councillors but also many other groups containing unsung heroes who all have a common goal that is to make sure that it remains like this.

The Parish Council will continue to work hard for the residents of Whitchurch on Thames and listening to what they want. One of our main aims is to formulate a Village Plan created from information which we will collect from the residents and which will give us a blue print for the future development of the village. I would urge you all to come to the open meeting here on Saturday between 11 and 3 and make your contribution to our vision for the future of Whitchurch.

We objected to demolition of Eastfield house and were instrumental in the prevention of the building of the Holiday home on the river. Many people work hard to support and make our village the beautiful place this is. We will continue to work hard in the coming year.

### **Report from County Councillor Kevin Bulmer**

- Budget - expecting £50M of savings needing to be made- it was actually £69M. Some hard choices have needed to be made and these have caused problems. Council tax was increased by the maximum of 2% plus 2% to allow for inflation of the living wage.
- District leaders have come up with a plan for unitisation but the current plan has hit a problem as its current form is not legal due to crossing police boundaries. A new plan is being formulated and we will need to wait to see what happens. County and district leaders are getting a report done separately on forming a unitary council as they have not agreed on an approach. County favour one unitary, this may have democratic issues due to its size and would need a way to involve locals in planning, transport and strategic decisions. One positive outcome would be parking - parish councils would be able to be more involved in this sort of issues.
- A 3rd bridge over the Thames is being discussed. A strategic study is being done - we have contributed some money towards it so that we can have a say. Need to make sure that the problem is not just being moved and traffic on this side would have quite an impact as the roads are not designed for lots of cars.
- Potholes - many to be seen at this time of year after the winter months and lots of rain, which also delays repairs. We are working on them and keep reporting them on "Fix My Street".
- Didcot - 3 people still missing under the structure. It is a very big job and will take some time to remove. They are still working out the best process. Nobody knows why the structure collapsed and how unsafe it is now. It is still a crime scene.
- A report is produced by Councillor Bulmer and distributed to the parish council every month. Please feel free to contact Councillor Bulmer with any issues or questions.
- Charles Cotgreave asked about Oxleys - it was answered that it is the vehicle through which funds are passed to various projects/facilities. A bid is put in by the district council and they manage the requests.

### **District Councillors' Report 2015 / 2016 (Read by Councillor Keith Brooks in his absence)**

Our new Council was formed following the elections in 2015, giving a very strong Conservative majority which has and will continue to help us deliver major positive initiatives. These have delivered more value for money and better services for the District.

Cabinet – we have had a full Schedule of Work ranging from Dealing with Homelessness, Refurbishment of facilities and equipment at our Leisure Centres and some of the District's Public Toilets, and Treasury Management and Investment Planning for the next few years. Cabinet has also worked hard with the other Councils involved in the development of the Corporate Services Project, extending the way we have worked with the Vale of the White Horse previously to deliver even greater efficiencies without degrading the services we offer.

Committees - As well as the full complement of committees, SODC is represented by members on a number of external boards. These include the Community Safety Partnership, the Local Enterprise Partnership, and The Chiltern Conservation Board. We are also represented on The River Thames Alliance, the Police And Crime Commissioners Panel and we are actively working on relaunching our commitment as a Council to the Armed Forces Covenant. A couple of the more unusual items to come before our Licencing Panels this year were an all-electric taxi For Didcot (we believe a first For Oxfordshire) and Licencing and amateur film for public performance.

Community Safety - Even with the major cuts of the austerity years, we have worked with our Police; Crime Commissioner in introducing initiatives, seeing Thames Valley Police Force performance improve from one of the least effective forces to the group right at the top of the League. We have also maintained our support for additional PCSOs in our District.

Waste And Recycling - For the second year SODC has been awarded top place in the Recycling League Table in the country. During the last year, the kerb-side collection of fabrics and small electrical items for recycling has been introduced. We are occasionally asked if waste really is recycled, and we can confirm that that is the case. Councillors have visited the BIFFA recycling Centre at Edmonton, the Agrivert Food and Garden Waste Facilities at Benson & the Anaerobic Digestion Facility at Cassington and also the Incinerator Facility at Yarnton, where the heat produced is used to generate electricity.

Finances - South Oxfordshire remains a financially sound council. Despite increasing financial restrictions we have been able to decrease, and for the coming year freeze, our part of the council tax. Our sound and prudent approach to money has still allowed us to maintain our Capital & Revenue Grants scheme. Maintaining our long term Financial Plan is vital, given the continuing reduction in Central Government Support, which we expect to see removed in the next three years.

Development – Didcot Garden Town – We have secured funding to help us develop Didcot for the 21 st Century, granting Garden Town Status. This will provide additional funding and enable us to deliver the infrastructure to support the new businesses and housing needed. This also includes the development of the Didcot Gateway, which aims to make the centre of the town a more attractive place to live and work.

Development – Berinsfield – For a long time, this Community has been in need of support and improvement, and Council has agreed funding for the necessary work to develop a Plan to improve the community and social infrastructure. This is a major piece of work and will lead to significant investment in the future.

Development – Local Plan – Work has continued to develop the Local Plan, setting out how future housing is to be delivered. The District has it's own requirement identified through to 2031 which amounts to some 15,000 homes, but this is likely to be higher as we will probably have to accept some of those required by Oxford City Council, which has been unable to identify sufficient land to meet it's needs. The Council also continues with strong support for Neighbourhood Planning, with more plans in the various stages of completion.

Development – Communities – Council has approved the new Corporate Plan, which looks at new and innovative initiatives to improve many aspects of life in the District, including air quality, social housing and transport, to name just a few. We have also provided the means for Town and Parish Councils and Voluntary Organisations to improve many facilities by way of our Grants Schemes.

## **Village Green & Residents Issues List - Jim Donahue**

### Village Green Working Group

Village Green Working Group – reformed this year, comprised of members from the School, Cricket Club, Football Club, Parish Council, and for the first time WOTHabs, to bring an environmental perspective.

Achievements included:

- Agreement on guidelines to maintain all areas of the VG and Maze and
- Development of contract with resident Jon Steward to maintain VG responsibilities for maintenance and overall village grounds – providing further cost savings to the community.
- Agreement on roles and responsibilities of FC and PC
- Added notice board to inform community of planned usage
- Agreement that charging School and Sports Clubs is not required as long as overall VG maintenance budget stays less than 10% of overall Parish Council precept

During September and October, we initiated a survey via a questionnaire for future use of the Village Green in the Bulletin and an on-line survey. It is clear from the survey feedback that the residents of the village place a high value on the Village Green for a broad range of purposes. Feedback included:

- Support for its use as sports facility for school, Cricket Club, and Football
- Supportive of VG as a place of beauty for quiet walks, to exercise dogs, and unorganised play for children
- It should be used for the Fete, other community picnics and social events, and could be used for letting to suitable private events with agreed charging, such as weddings and private parties after the new pavilion is
- Skateboard and biking ramps were not supported, and fitness trail also not deemed unnecessary. There was support for a basketball net for teenagers and other age groups in the future.
- Regarding the use for the new pavilion – there was clear support for replacement of the current pavilion facilities and there were numerous comments on whether the pavilion footprint should stay as it is, or be expanded to support broader use for private functions to raise revenue and community functions. Further feedback is being sought as part of the Village Plan.

It is also worth noting that we now have two fully functional natural picnic benches made from the large fallen oak tree off Eastfield lane with benches from Hardwick estate cut by Tim Sheldon.

The VG WG will continue to meet as required to address its future use and any significant changes or improvements that are required.

### Residents Issue List

Whitchurch on Thames seems like a typically quiet, idyllic English country village. It's hard to believe that we have a list of 68 issues raised by the residents. The list started while I was canvassing for the local elections last May. I knocked on at least 300 doors and asked everyone what local issues they had that they wanted to Parish Council to address. In the end I compiled a list of 44 different issues ranging from potholes on Eastfield Lane, to the toll bridge fare (a big issue at the time) to traffic and parking on the High Street. Since last May, the number of issues has risen 68 as new issues have come up such as the Local Bus 143 cuts and we consolidated the previous TAPAG issues into the list. But I am happy to say that 18 of these issues are now considered closed, and a further 9 have been looked into by the council, and, while not resolved in all cases, we have taken them as far as we can as a council. So we have addressed approximately 40% of these issues in the past year.

So what have we done?

- A number of issues required us following up with the council nor other external parties to clarify things like street cleaning times or if the bridge company to see if they provide discounts to blue badge disability holders.
- Some were addressed by the work I described earlier on the Village
- Some were addressed by volunteer actions in the community for things like killing weeds on kerbs, cutting back overgrown hedges or digging out the 'ford' at the bottom of Path hill that appeared every winter and often in the summer as well.

Of the remaining 41 issues that are still open – many of these are more difficult issues that will take more time to address, but we are taking action on all of these and the plans for each are documented in the Residents List spread sheet:

- Some of the issues that are in progress include: Repaving 'the Cut' between Eastfield Lane and Swanston field – first raised in 1992 and due to finally happen shortly; working with Goring Heath to restore the War Memorial; James will tell you about the work TAPAG is doing to provide a safer crossing in front of the toll bridge, and to initiate Community Speedwatch to address speeding in the village; Jon Steward will also tell you about the work he is doing to restore the old derelict Polish Church site. And you can talk to Rachel and all of us at the open day about ideas to address some of the more difficult longer term issues such as parking on the High Street. And I'm sure new issues will be raised.
- Then this leaves some of the most difficult issues on the list – things like providing more affordable housing in the village; the fact that Eastfield Lane really needs a complete repaving; and so does the pavement on Hardwick Road. These issues will take more time and may require us to do things differently in the future. The re-paving of the Cut and the passing places on Hardwick Road are examples of OCC allowing us to change the highways they are responsible for on their behalf. These precedents and new devolution of powers proposals coming through will allow us to more of these things in the future, like subsidising Bus 143, but it would also mean we would need to pay for them out of our precept. Increasing the precept is not something we would do without asking the residents to vote on it.

But regardless of how long it takes to address these issues, I think that maintaining a residents list is a way for us to show that we are aware of the issues and have taken accountability for addressing the issues or that we are working with the organisations that are accountable, and to be transparent in what we are doing as a Parish Council. And of course we can't do it alone, so we look forward to residents coming forward to us not just

with issues, but with proposed solutions, and the Village Plan process is the perfect way to do this, so I hope you will all participate.

### **TAPAG update - James Polanski**

- Potholes most frustrating situation - all have been reported - some fed back as fixed although clearly not done. This has been escalated.
- Cut - getting it resurfaced
- Spoil dumped by the side of the road - it was agreed that it would be covered over if they are allowed to keep it there - WOTHABS would like it to be removed - the highways (SODC) say nothing needs to be done.
- Pedestrian safety - Whitchurch bridge company have agreed to replace the "speed bump" with a raised flat platform. We have applied for the community speed watch programme. Looking to make a safe crossing for school children by eastfield lane.
- Traffic - success with white lines in the village to restrict parking.
- Parking - issues with tickets being issued
- The village plan will be a vital part of finding solutions to many of these issues
- Soak Always - many have been cleared on Whitchurch Hill but more to be done in Eastfield Lane
- Flooding - Eastfield lane pumping station has had telemetry fitted to ensure capacity is managed to prevent flooding.
- Village sign - children at WOT school designed - winner chosen and the village is now voting for the final
- Comments -
  - Whitchurch Hill, cars go very fast through past the church - should be 30.
  - Lorries get stuck - idea to have big sign to stop them. (Councillor Polanski stated work has been done to try and work with BP. Councillor Bulmer looked to get a motion passed to enforce use of commercial satnav). John Southy has been looking into this and keeping records. Sue Matthews proposed we work with Goring Heath to get more signage to prevent the lorries.
  - Road being fixed and re fixed as different people come to do work, needs to be better communication to prevent poor work being carried out.
  - Speed watch discussed - many people are very happy with that plan
  - Keith update people on a recent meeting with the police regarding the parking on the corner with Howick road. They suggested double yellow lines from the Art gallery to the give way lines. White lines would need to be funded by us and would cost £7000.
  - Outside the ferryboat issues with people driving on the pavement - need bollard to protect pedestrians.

### **PAWS – Events June 2015 to June 2016**

- 17th June Climate Change March in London, met up with WBGF members
- 5th July PAWS/ WOTHABS Haymeadow walk
- 9th July Cliff and Heather Thorne attended the Soil Association Seminar at Yeo Valley Farm
- 16th July PAWS discussion evening, good attendance
- 27th September PAWS barn dance
- 28th September Apple Juicing day

- October half term Bee Hunt in Pangbourne
- 19th November Climate Change March in London, 100 signed cards supporting the Paris Summit sent to the PM
- 28th January Draught Buster talk
- 20th February Visit to Green Unit, facilitated by Peter Ferguson
- 3rd March Talk by James Norman, 'Feed the world without costing the Earth'
- 19th March participated in the Pangbourne litter pick up. Also in March the education group led the Schools forum at Whitchurch Primary School
- 9th April Swap shop held in Pangbourne Village Hall,

PAWS has also written:-

- Letter to West Reading MP and MP for South Oxfordshire regarding the proposed closure of the 143 bus.
- Letter to West Reading MP regarding the closure of the public toilets in Pangbourne

Events coming soon

- 28th May WBGE running an E VENT in Newbury Town centre. Excellent opportunity to explore the latest in electric and hybrid cars.
- 2nd June Talk by Peter Mc Manners on the 'Sustainability of Aviation' followed by the AGM at 8.00pm in the Old Stables

**Allotment Society - Mike Marshall**

- Mike has had an allotment in WOT since 2007 and helps run the committee
- WOT allotments is one of 3 allotment sites. The PC is the tenant and it is sublet to the allotment committee and members
- Have always struggled to keep members number up.
- Different ideas of how it should look - from Chelsea flower show to 'as long as something is growing its ok'
- Allotments are shared with a badger set! We also get foxes, deer and rabbits. Even the plots that are not cultivated are a huge asset and support the wildlife. There are also newts!
- Finances are always tricky - a pump is used and water is pumped into baths for watering. The pump is therefore absolutely vital.
- 2 ride on mowers -both pretty old - and a strummer.
- This year the parish council is supplying new gates.
- There are a couple of spare plots - some we are waiting to see if people are renewing.
- This year looking to buy a load of manure from Hardwick Estate for the use of the allotment tenants.

**Bulletin**

- We have a new editor Richard Williams and everyone agreed he is doing a superb job.

**Sue Matthews - church warden**

- The Church is open every day - this week is national week of prayer - 12 - 6 pm every day. Last one noon on Saturday.
- Reading Phoenix choir and primary school Saturday night. Tickets on the door £10

- Roof had to be repaired (the concert is to raise money for this) and needs more work doing to it.
- Community coffee mornings and Art Cafe Saturdays. This has raised almost £5000 for chair since November.
- Please contact Jill or Sue for use of the hall.

## **Twinning Report**

1. Grateful thanks for the donation which allowed us to entertain the La Bouille party of 34 people last year
2. We expect to be able to finance the return visit in 2017 ourselves.
4. All residents are welcome, and entitled, to take part. We would like more people to be involved.

### **Report on the visit to La Bouille 29th April to 2nd May 2016**

Our visit this year, the thirty-eighth year of twinning, was especially enjoyable. We have become accustomed to our host's warm hospitality, but in addition there was sunny weather, delightful visits and a sense of community between the people of the two villages. Whatever the decision, on June 23rd (referendum on European Community), that would remain.

The journey by luxury coach was smooth, the channel calm, and we arrived in good spirits to be entertained by our French hosts that evening. Saturday was spent in many different ways. There were visits to the abbey of Bec Hellouin (hence Bec Tithe in Whitchurch Hill), a rope makers, wildlife park, a chateau with costumed guides and family get togethers. One outing was to Rouen to visit the Impressionist exhibition, and also in Rouen the Amazon exhibition and 24 hour river race.

The Saturday evening reception was held in the grenier a sel – now an art gallery – in honour of Nick Brazil's exhibition there of his life in photographs. The mayor welcomed us, speeches made, with champagne toasts, and then an exchange of gifts – ours was the Alphabet of Whitchurch book by Vivien Chambers. At the village hall a four course buffet dinner was laid out and then Ecole Musique, an amateur swing and blues band got us dancing to late o'clock.

Up early on Sunday, we spent a couple of hours exploring the beautiful town of Honfleur. It was the first of May, so the custom of giving muguet (lily of the valley) "for happiness" brought sellers on every street. We then boarded a small boat which took us under the Normandy Bridge, a record 2808ft cable stay bridge opened in 1995, and then along the Normandy coast. The picnic in fine weather was in the Ciderie de la Pommeraie. A talk and tasting followed of the three products – pommeau, calvados, and crème de calvados – and purchases were made.



Monday morning too provided opportunities for buying gifts, patisserie, table cloths or anything else at the market of Bourg Achard nearby. With great regret, (and tears from Martine of course) we left to catch the ferry, and were back at Whitchurch at 9pm.

There were twenty in our party, of whom four were making their first visit to La Bouille. I believe everyone had a really good time, and being received in people's homes, learned a lot. Some photographs can be seen on the Whitchurch on Thames website

### **History Society Report**

1. Monthly lectures are held September to May either in Whitchurch Village Hall or Goring Heath Parish Hall. There are outings June and July.
2. Membership numbers are steady at around thirty five – more would allow speakers to be paid easily.
3. We rely on Art Café and other fund raising events to supply funds, as speakers now cost £60 on average.
4. Our publications can be seen on the website.
5. We answer enquiries from around the world if we can!
6. Next meeting May 19<sup>th</sup> – votes for women in Oxfordshire at Goring Heath Parish Rooms, all welcome.

### **Whitchurch Bridge Company**

- Keith thanks the company for agreeing to wave the cost of the crossing for the bus  
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### **WoTHABS REPORT Sally Woolhouse, Treasurer**

The Whitchurch-on-Thames Habitat Study Group (WoTHabs) continues to try and fulfil its Primary aims, which are to encourage the protection and enhancement of habitats in the parish and to promote local interest and enthusiasm for the natural environment.

Over the past year, we have organized a number of events for the community.

The most popular event, which we have been running annually since 2008, was held again last June at Chalkhills. It is aimed at primary age children and it gives them the opportunity to look for and learn about the different creatures and plants which are found in the natural surroundings of fields and woods, at the same time as having fun and enjoying themselves. We had a stall at the Village Fete last September where we talked to people about wildlife they have seen in our local area, and tried to encourage them to report sightings to us or to BBOWT, the local Wildlife Trust, or to the Thames Valley Environmental Records Office. The recent reports of sightings of otter and mink on the river have been followed by us with interest. It does seem highly likely that otters are now visiting our stretch of the Thames – they have a range of 40km so these could be the same animals which have been filmed at Withymead Reserve near South Stoke. BBOWT have recently installed a mink detection raft on our stretch. These are a well-proven way of detecting the presence of mink and also otter – the creatures leave their footprints in the soft clay pad. In November, the Thames Valley Fungus group held a Fungus Foray at Chalkhills and Whitchurch residents were invited to join them.

Two Guided walks to see the cowslips at Chalkhills were held just last Sunday (8 th May). The weather was glorious but unfortunately the turnout was very disappointing. Three more events are being held this summer – another Explorers Day in June, a Haymeadow Walk at Hardwick in July (which is a combined event with PAWS) and a Riverbank Plant Survey by boat in August. All these events will be advertised by poster and on the village website. As well as running events, WoTHabs continues, when invited, to provide advice and guidance to the Parish Council on the management of the green spaces in the parish. We are pleased to be consulted on the maintenance of the VG and the Maze area through Gill Goodwin, WoTHABS representative on the Village Green Working Group.

Finally, we continue to work on our long-term project for the restoration of the once flower-rich verges on Hardwick Road. We produced a Vision Statement in 2012 which was well received by our then County and District councillors, resulting in the awarding of grants to the PC totalling £8000. This was spent on constructing the 2 tarmacked passing places at the narrow village entrance. We are now applying for a grant from TOE2 (the Trust for Oxfordshire Environment) which if successful, will be spent on restoring and re-seeding approx. 220 metres of eroded verges (on both sides of the road) as far as the Hardwick Estate gates. This should make it a safer and more pleasant walk out of the village for everyone.

If you would like to find out more about our activities, or have any questions for us, please speak to me afterwards or get in touch via our webpage, which has a link from the Village website.

### **Whitchurch United Charities**

- Supports children 5-25 that are in learning who benefit from financial support for learning, trips etc.
- Funds are invested with standard charity investment funds

Thank you to all who attended and presented at this session.